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Cyrus Tilton's Labyrinth at Vessel Gallery

The art space reopens with enigmatic figure sculptures.

By DeWitt Cheng



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In **Bob Shaw's** story "The Gioconda Caper," a copy of **Leonardo's** *Mona Lisa* is discovered — but with the hands altered. More discrepant paintings are found in a Milan cave, along with a toppled circular armature and a peep-holed sentry box. It's a proto-zoetrope; when the paintings are affixed to the spinning drum, the viewer watches a handmade film loop in which the lady alternately flashes a boob and smiles enigmatically.

Zoetropes, with their crude but magical flip-book/Rolodex animation, fascinate Oakland sculptor **Cyrus Tilton**, as demonstrated by his show of sculptures and related drawings, *A Place In-Between*. "Relation" depicts a man (whitened, like a marble statue) seated atop a stool; turn the crank, and sepia-toned watercolor paintings reveal the stoic subject executing a stiff-necked head roll. In "Revolution," a naked, blank-faced woman resembling a figure from Moore or Marini holds a mask up like a lorgnette; pivoting from her elbow are alternate rotating forearms and masks. "The Falling Dream" mounts a white oval sculpture of six slightly rotated faces with varying features (like double Trinities) atop the crank mechanism from a hand drill; the group head has been cut into independently movable eye, nose, and mouth discs, however, so that when it stops spinning, new faces emerge.

Tilton makes non-kinetic sculptures, too, but they continue his interest in movement, metamorphosis, and a rough-hewn magic. "Eugene" features a naked woodsman leaning on his ax atop a trunklike, cylindrical base while a bare-branched tree sprouts from his neck. "Run" depicts a sprinting animal in an homage to *Watership Down's* rabbit heroes; the animal's limbs have broken off, however, revealing the metal armature beneath, and the wire-supported crown that replaces its head seems as much bait (or metal-mouthed trap) as divine attribute. "Finding Balance" similarly plays with sculptural process, its rootlike metal armature humanized by its female torso and graceful posing. "High Hopes" places a horse on a wooden plinth atop a steel-rod cubic base; from its back springs scaffolding that supports a slab of hillside bearing three scraggly trees. Tilton, who fabricates sculptures for Richmond's **Scientific Art Studio** (e.g., the bas-relief of **Barry Bonds'** 500th home run), uses his anatomical knowledge and expert craftsmanship to good effect, but he also knows how to use material and process poetically: "It's about knowing when to quit ... when to keep your hands off. ... Once you start ... to mold it like life, it dies." *A Place In-Between* runs along with art jewelry by **Eric Silva** through June 5 at **Vessel Gallery** (471 25th St., Oakland), 510-893-8800 or Vessel-Gallery.com

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